

He is married to Belinda Taylor Jones and they have a son, Christopher.

REMEMBERING THE NEWTOWN TRAGEDY

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, this Saturday will mark 1 year since one of the most horrific tragedies in our nation's history: the murder of 26 innocents at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, CT on December 14, 2012. All of us remember the shock we felt when we heard the news reports. Twenty first graders—only 6 or 7 years old—were gunned down in their classrooms, and six educators were killed while trying to protect their students from harm.

The events of that day were heart-breaking. As we come upon the grim 1-year anniversary of that event, our thoughts and our prayers are with the families and friends of the victims. Many of them stood in a nearby firehouse on that day waiting for first responders to bring them any word about their loved ones in the school. One by one, the first responders brought down children and teachers to the firehouse to reunite them with their families—until the families of the victims were the only ones left. Then it became clear that no more would be coming.

These families have suffered immensely. But in the face of their grief and loss, they have shown incredible strength and courage. They have supported one another with a strong sense of community and faith, and they have dedicated themselves to the cause of sparing other families what they have gone through.

I have met with many of these families over the past year. They have come to meet with Members of Congress, and with lawmakers in many States, to share their ideas for how to reduce the devastating toll of gun violence. I salute them for their courage, and I thank them for standing up on behalf of so many families across America who have lost a loved one to gunfire.

Over 11,000 Americans are murdered with guns each year. If we count suicides and accidental shootings, the death toll from guns rises to more than 31,000 Americans each year. This epidemic of gun violence is unacceptable. We cannot simply shrug our shoulders and write off these shootings as the cost of living in America.

In my home State of Illinois, I have met too many grieving mothers who have lost their children to senseless gun violence—mothers such as: Annette Nance-Holt, who lost her son Blair in the crossfire of a gang shooting; Mary Kay Mace, whose daughter Ryanne was killed in her classroom at Northern Illinois University; Pam Bosley, whose son Terrell was shot and killed outside of church; and Cleo Pendleton, whose daughter Hadiya was gunned down at a bus stop where she was seeking shelter from the rain.

I do not want to go to another funeral for a police officer like Chicago

Police Officer Thomas Wortham IV, who was killed by gang members with a straw-purchased gun. I do not want to hear about any more killers who couldn't pass a background check but still were able to buy guns through a private sale—such as the man who murdered Ricky Byrdson, the former Northwestern University basketball coach, in Skokie, IL.

We need to take proactive steps, consistent with the Constitution and the Second Amendment, to stop these situations from happening. We need to reduce this high number of violent shootings. We can do this by working for better gun safety laws that will spare other families what these families have gone through. No matter how long it may take, no matter how challenging the road may seem, this is a goal worth fighting for.

We have seen some positive steps forward when it comes to gun safety in the past year. For the first time ever, the Senate confirmed a director to head the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. We have seen an end to the federal funding restrictions on research into the causes of gun violence. We have seen significant growth in crime gun tracing, especially with the eTrace program that has helped catch criminals and gun traffickers in Illinois and nationwide, and important new gun safety laws have passed in States such as California, Colorado, Connecticut, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, and my home State of Illinois, where universal background checks and mandatory reporting of lost and stolen guns are now the law.

We know that more needs to be done. Earlier this year, we failed to get the 60 Senate votes we need to ensure that a criminal background check is conducted on every gun sale. The Senate also fell a few votes short when it comes to toughening our laws against straw purchasing and illegal gun trafficking. Of course, the House of Representatives has not even tried to pass legislation to reduce gun violence.

I know it is frustrating to many Americans when Congress fails to act on commonsense steps such as these. It is frustrating for me too, but I am not giving up. The goal of reducing gun deaths in America is worth fighting for. We may not have the votes we need in Congress today, but if the American people speak out and work hard for commonsense reform, we will achieve it.

I salute my colleagues in both parties who have worked hard this past year to push for commonsense gun safety laws especially the Senators from Connecticut, Senators BLUMENTHAL and MURPHY, who have become such admirable leaders on this issue. I also commend Senators MANCHIN and TOOMEY, who have crafted a balanced background check bill to make sure that we aren't selling guns to criminals; and Senators LEAHY, KIRK, COLLINS and GILLIBRAND, who have worked with me on a bill to crack down on the straw

purchasers and gun traffickers who supply criminals with weapons.

The votes haven't been there yet, but we will keep at it. It may not happen right away, but we are in this for the long haul. The families from Newtown are going to keep working for these reforms, and so must we. I am confident that working together, we will pass commonsense reforms that save lives.

REMEMBERING MICHAEL JOSEPH O'SHEA

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, as I often point out, our country is a country of immigrants. And the City of Chicago, almost without rival, is a city of immigrants.

Earlier this week, Chicago lost a wonderful adopted son.

Michael Joseph O'Shea—"Joe," as his friends and family called him—was born in Ballynacally, County Clare, Ireland in 1937.

He came to America in 1959, when he was just 18 years old, and like so many sons and daughters of Ireland before him, he quickly made Chicago his home.

You knew Joe O'Shea was Irish before he ever opened his mouth. To borrow a phrase from Eugene O'Neill, he had the map of Ireland all over his face. And his face was rarely without a smile.

There's an old Irish saying: "Bricks and mortar make a house, but the laughter of children makes a home." Well, there was a lot of laughter in the home that Joe and his wife Mary made on the South Side of Chicago.

Joe and Mary were blessed with four children: Michael, Daniel, Colleen, and my friend Sean, through whom I got to know Joe.

In addition to the laughter of children—and later, grandchildren—the O'Shea home was filled with something else almost as beautiful: the sounds of Irish music.

Joe O'Shea was a past president of the Chicago Irish Music Association and he was one of the best Irish accordion players you have ever heard, or ever will hear.

In 2000, Joe was honored to play for President and Mrs. Clinton at their annual St. Patrick's Day celebration at the White House. In the audience were many of the leaders of his adopted land as well as the Prime Minister and other visiting dignitaries from Ireland. It was a proud moment that Joe treasured.

Joe's love of Irish music and dance and his masterful, joyful performances will help to keep that part of Chicago culture vibrant for many years to come.

Like many Chicago families, the O'Shea family has split loyalties when it came to baseball. But they are united in love and support for each other.

Loretta and I wish to express our deep condolences to Joe's wife, Mary, their children and their two beloved